

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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MORTON ANNOUNCES TRANSPLANT OF ALEUTIAN CANADA GEESE

Secretary of the Interior Rogers C. B. Morton today announced his Department is transplanting the Aleutian Canada goose, an endangered species reared in captivity near the Nation's Capitol, back to the Aleutian Islands in the Bering Sea.

Secretary Morton said the 75 birds to be transplanted will be flown to Alaska March 10. He explained that if the transplant is successful, the species will have a better chance to escape extinction in the wild.

Secretary Morton said the birds are descendants of goslings captured in 1963 on Buldir Island in the Aleutians, their only remaining occupied breeding habitat in the wild. They have been reared by the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, at its Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland.

The birds will be transplanted to Amchitka Island, 1,600 miles southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. It is part of the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge.

At the turn of the century, Aleutian Canada geese spent their summers on many islands of the Aleutians. Fur traders, however, were interested in establishing colonies of blue foxes in the Aleutians to be harvested for their valued fur. But blue foxes wiped out geese wherever they came in contact.

Lack of safe landing beaches may have deterred the release of foxes on Buldir Island and saved the breeding population of this small goose from extinction. About 200 Aleutian Canada geese exist there now. Aleutians are the only endangered subspecies of Canada geese.

Secretary Morton said that Amchitka, site of some of the Atomic Energy Commission's underground nuclear testing, is chosen for the coming transplant because of its suitable habitat and logistical advantages. Blue foxes have been eliminated from the island by the Bureau.

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Biologists report that the A.E.C.'s program is not considered a menace to geese, but other risks are involved: (1) Will the geese migrate southward in winter as their wild forebears have done, or risk death during Amchitka's severe winters? (2) Can these newly released birds travel safely, or will they wind up in the Pacific Ocean? (3) Can they cope with potential predators such as bald eagles and peregrin falcons? (4) Will the environment be favorable for breeding?

Secretary Morton said that the experiment will be monitored closely by Bureau biologists. Supervising the release operation will be Dr. Ray Erickson, Patuxent's assistant director for endangered wildlife research. Extra food will be on hand in case the geese do not take to the island's natural vegetation in the beginning. They are being released in an area where fresh water and forage can be found during most of the year.

Birds will be marked with yellow plastic leg bands indicating age and year of release. If released birds follow the pattern of their wild predecessors, they will winter in the interior valleys of Oregon and California, and in Japan.

BSFW will attempt additional transplants every two or three years until re-establishment of breeding populations is assured on Amchitka and other Aleutian Islands.

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